



Save the Children

Class at the Garmu School, Bong County, Liberia



Consultation & Participation for Local Ownership *What? Why? How?*

The U.S. government is increasingly using consultative and participatory approaches to formulate, implement and evaluate its development programs, accepting the value of local knowledge and the importance of host country ownership in creating policies and programs that work. This is a positive trend – deeper engagement of partner governments, citizens and other stakeholders in decisions affecting them contributes to more efficient, effective and sustainable outcomes.

This brief explores issues for policymakers and practitioners to consider as part of this renewed emphasis on stakeholder participation in development programs. It makes suggestions for how the U.S. government can best strengthen its own models of engagement and consultation, while also providing support to national governments and civil societies to make their own processes more inclusive, more fully owned, and ongoing rather than one-off.

Save the Children's research suggests three strategies to frame the pursuit of effective and meaningful engagements with local governments and citizens:

- ▶ Tailor participatory requirements to country-specific contexts;
- ▶ Give equal emphasis to both the quality and quantity of engagement; and
- ▶ Equip U.S. policies and bureaucratic structures with adequate country-level flexibility.

Understanding consultation & participation for locally owned development

President Obama recently stated to the UN Summit on the Millennium Development Goals that the purpose of development is helping nations to move from a state of poverty to one of prosperity. But no single expert, agency, community or government holds all the answers to how to bring about this transformation.

Instead, many years of foreign assistance has taught us that sustainable development requires drawing on the experiences and resources of a wide range of groups from civil society, the private sector, national governments, and international institutions.

Why is the consultation and participation of citizens and governments important for development?

When done well, wide stakeholder consultation and participation in program design and implementation lead to mutually reinforcing benefits, encouraging the local ownership of development resources and activities. These benefits are:

- ▶ **Increased sustainability:** By engaging people – including governments, civil society, local communities, the private sector, and academia – in the decisions that affect them, each group is more likely to build a stake in the success or failure of activities. Ideas imposed from outside often fail to gain the same traction as policies that local governments and communities have been involved in devising and over which they feel a sense of ownership.
- ▶ **Better targeting of resources:** An enlarged circle of participants engaged in policymaking and program management improves the likelihood that policies will be responsive to local needs, based upon experience, relevant to communities and governments, and inclusive of normally excluded minorities.
- ▶ **Strengthened accountability relationships between all stakeholders:** Meaningful engagements around policy and program choices create multi-way relationships between governments, development partners and citizens. By opening up their policies for consultation, donors and national governments show a commitment to be responsive to community priorities. Citizen engagement in policy design and program implementation encourages mutual responsibility and the sharing of risk between all stakeholders for programs outcomes.

The following sections of this brief identify three strategies that the U.S. government should consider to strengthen its own models of engagement and consultation, while also providing support to national governments and civil societies to make their processes more inclusive, more widely owned, and ongoing rather than one-off. These strategies are:

- ▶ Tailor participatory requirements to country-specific contexts;
- ▶ Give equal emphasis to both the quality and quantity of engagement; and
- ▶ Equip U.S. policies and bureaucratic structures with adequate country-level flexibility.

“I can’t own something that I don’t value. Ownership must be equal to value. People must understand what we are trying to do, and consultations play an important role in this.”

“Consultations create consensus, rally people behind an idea and a common goal.”

– International NGO, Tanzania

“Country ownership is a range of issues. Firstly, it means to me that a country’s identified priorities have been addressed. At the macro-level through the government, at the meso-level through the states, and at the micro-level through the village. Secondly, the planning and implementation of programs is done with the South Sudanese at the fore.”

– Local NGO, South Sudan

Box I: The Obama administration's commitments to consultation & participation

The Obama administration has made some important new commitments – and reaffirmed existing initiatives – to seeking out and including input from relevant development stakeholders. The realities of implementing these initiatives will be challenging, but in principle all signal strong efforts to make the U.S. development program more responsive to local priorities and needs:

- ▶ The **Presidential Policy Directive on Development**, announced by President Obama in September 2010, places emphasis on country ownership and responsibility. It recognizes the benefits of working with a range of host country actors and pledges to leverage the contributions of the private sector, civil society and others to “reorient our approach to prioritize partnership from policy conception through to implementation.”
- ▶ **USAID’s implementation and procurement reforms** include steps to enable partner country governments, civil society and the private sector to engage more directly with U.S. government development programs.
- ▶ The **Global Health Initiative (GHI)** pledges to apply country-led approaches to deliver health improvements. Country plans for GHI are to be formulated in consultation with Congress, developing country governments, civil society, other donors, the private sector, and multilateral institutions.
- ▶ **Feed the Future** includes a compulsory consultation element to enable countries to graduate from the program’s first to its second phase (and thereby access enhanced resources). Partner governments are required to provide evidence of the kinds of consultations conducted.
- ▶ Through both practice and legislation, the **Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)** has institutionalized consultation with partner governments and other stakeholders. The MCC works hard to make consultative processes country specific while maintaining the minimum standards expected of each compact process.

“We seem to do all the right things, go through all the right steps, but then the projects don’t work. So we ask ourselves what the problem is. And it’s because we don’t have a partner in the village. We need someone who takes ownership of the project.”

– *Ministry of Planning & Economic Cooperation, Jordan*

“We’re moving from telling countries what they need to do, to helping people do what they want to do. To us, country ownership is about partnership with national governments with responsible stewardship from USAID.”

– *USAID/Jordan*

Strategy I: Tailor participatory requirements to country-specific contexts

In and of themselves, consultations and other activities to include stakeholder input to policymaking and program implementation have no inherent value – it is how they are conducted and what they lead to that matters. To get the best possible results, it is critical that the U.S. and local governments consider country contexts and stakeholder participation when designing and implementing policies and programs.

For instance, where U.S. government initiatives – such as Feed the Future – contain compulsory consultation elements, these should accommodate the array of country circumstances in which they will play out. Minimum standards for participatory activities should not be overly prescriptive. Guidelines should instead allow for U.S. government personnel and other in-country experts to identify opportunities for meaningful host country participation according to each country's institutional capacity and political culture. To facilitate this, we suggest:

- **Establish levels of and approaches to engagement tailored to each country's circumstances:** The processes and approaches used by the U.S. and national governments to conduct their consultations should be selected according to the capacities and willingness of governmental and non-governmental actors. See *Figure 1: Levels of stakeholder engagement in policymaking and programming*.

In countries like South Sudan where civil society and the government are extremely weak, information sharing is a useful place to start engagement, ensuring that, at the least, all stakeholders are informed of each other's priorities.

At the other end of the spectrum, in countries like Jordan where both government and civil society have relatively solid institutional capacities, the U.S. government should encourage more intensive forms of stakeholder engagement in policymaking and programming, pointing towards eventual partnership between donors, civil society, the private sector, national governments and others.

- **Consider different modalities to institutionalize stakeholder engagement:** Depending upon the capacities and willingness of host governments and nongovernmental stakeholders, there are a variety of institutional structures and modalities that can be used to promote the ongoing and quality engagement of stakeholders with each other around development policies.

For instance, the MCC insists that a broad spectrum of governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders must be involved in the design of programs and ongoing management of resources.

The Global Fund takes a similar approach. It aims to have at least 40 percent of the membership of its in-country management mechanisms drawn from nongovernmental groups, to complement the contributions of representatives from national governments and international development partners. See *Box 2: The Millennium Challenge Corporation – models of consultation in action* and *Box 3: The Global Fund – wide ranging stakeholder participation*.

Figure 1: Levels of stakeholder engagement in policymaking & programming



- ▶ Establish transparent selection procedures for nongovernmental representatives to improve the quality and diversity of participation: There can be an overwhelming number of NGOs, civil society umbrella groups, and private sector actors in any country; knowing who to include in consultative processes to ensure quality and representativeness of input can be daunting. Where governments and donors monopolize the selection, one or a handful of the better funded or more articulate civil society organizations may dominate proceedings. In some cases, this can lead to these organizations building their influence through external patronage rather than links to their constituents.

To address this situation, those organizing consultations or other events to engage public stakeholders should publicize their events widely and appropriately, also actively seeking the inclusion of organizations working for the poorest and most marginalized. If the consultation process cannot be open to all, nongovernmental groups should be relied upon to select their own representatives according to a transparent system devised by themselves.

“There is good will from development partners but with one underlying assumption: that the state has the capacity to engage, to negotiate, as equals. Unfortunately, the government just does not have those capacities...The institutional capacities are lacking so, of course, the development agendas aren’t necessarily those of the government.”

— International NGO, Tanzania

Box 2: The Millennium Challenge Corporation – models of consultation in action

It's useful to highlight some of the best practices to emerge from the MCC's consultative and participatory processes:

- ▶ **A clear definition of and purpose to consultation:** MCC defines consultative processes as repeated “two-way communications” between MCC and stakeholders.² MCC tries to manage unrealistic expectations about what consultations will include and can achieve.
- ▶ **Provide support to partner countries to solve problems:** Partner countries may not understand how to or be willing to engage in an MCC consultation. In cases like this, such as in Jordan, initial government hesitancy was mitigated by the MCC’s idea that a well-respected local NGO with skills in consultative methodologies be contracted to work with the Prime Ministry to facilitate the consultations.³
- ▶ **Use existing domestic mechanisms:** MCC avoids the duplication of existing citizen-government consultative structures. For instance, the timing of Tanzania’s compact development fell shortly after the country had completed an extensive process to inform its national poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). MCC was satisfied with a reduced consultation process, using the PRSP’s findings to inform its decisions.
- ▶ **Tailor ongoing activities to each project cycle phase:** MCC matches the most effective consultative method to the different stages of compact development, activity implementation and evaluation. It also insists that consultations should be ongoing processes, rather than a one-off event. Partner countries should consult with stakeholders throughout the entire compact process and reflect outcomes in their decision-making.
- ▶ **Include a wide range of local stakeholders in management:** When a country is awarded a compact, it sets up a local MCC accountable entity to manage program implementation. Civil society and private sector participation are integrated in the decision-making process by having representatives on the management board of the accountable entity. Advisory councils of nongovernmental stakeholders also make recommendations to the accountable entity.

“When we came to do the consultations, people said to us,

‘We always thought the government would do whatever it wanted to do without asking us. Then they started asking us, but would not do what we said. But for the MCC, they listened and responded to what we said.’”

— MCC Team, Government of Jordan

Strategy 2: Give equal emphasis to both the quality and quantity of engagement

Consultations and participatory approaches to development programming take time and resources. In every country there are countless consultations going on at any one time, driven by a wide range of governments and development partners. For example, in a three month period in 2010 in South Sudan, donors held at least five separate consultations on their distinct strategic plans.

In time and resource constrained environments, it is important to make these consultative processes count. To improve the quality and ensure the appropriate quantity of engagement, Save the Children recommends:

- ▶ **Improve the basics of consultations through better preparation, implementation and follow-up:** Individual consultations need to be better organized than many currently are, applying the principles in *Figure 2: Elements of effective consultations*, as context appropriate.
- ▶ **Support the widening of civic space:** So that the U.S. government can have the widest range of tools available to it and so it can most appropriately support national governments in finding out what their citizens prioritize, the U.S. government should support a widening of civic space and foster efforts to encourage accountability and transparency. Without this, consultative processes risk remaining “box ticking” exercises rather than effective tools to deepen the engagement of citizens and governments.
- ▶ **Prioritize long-term capacity building for national governments:** U.S. government support should also deepen partner government capacities. Without this, host government skills in conducting their own consultations and participating in those organized by development partners will remain limited.

The Presidential Policy Directive on Development and Feed the Future commit to capacity building of host governments. This is encouraging. Efforts should focus on activities to build the institutional enabling environment for country leadership of development resources. Interventions should include long-term technical assistance – commitments of not less than five years – to civil services and public institutions.

- ▶ **Increase long-term capacity support for local civil society:** Just as national governments must have the skills to participate in externally led consultations and to conduct their own, civil society also needs to have the know-how and resources to play a constructive role. At present, many local NGOs lack financial resources and experience to engage.

USAID and other U.S. government agencies should invest greater resources in long-term capacity building for local NGOs, and consider training in participatory and consultative skills. See Save the Children's brief, *Supporting Local Ownership & Building National Capacity: Working with Local Non-governmental Organizations*.⁴

Figure 2: Elements of effective consultations

Preparation

- ✓ Invite stakeholders to allow for adequate preparation time.
- ✓ Communicate consultation parameters, including topics not up for discussion.
- ✓ Choose accessible meeting venues and avoid short-notice changes.
- ✓ Provide support for travel costs.
- ✓ Distribute consultation documents in appropriate languages and mediums.
- ✓ Consider alternative forms of communication to reach the illiterate or less well-connected.
- ✓ Encourage stakeholders to hold advance meetings to prepare.

Consultation

- ✓ Use a trained facilitator.
- ✓ Ensure adequate staff support.
- ✓ Provide translation to local languages.
- ✓ Take into account the needs and contributions of minority groups.
- ✓ Complement official consultations with direct discussions with the poor, including focus groups, participatory research and visits to communities.

Follow-up

- ✓ Provide written feedback. Invite corrections and omissions.
- ✓ Allow anonymous feedback and recommendations for improvement of processes.
- ✓ Identify which points have been accepted, which have not, and why.
- ✓ Outline next steps and what stakeholders can next expect.
- ✓ Make all appropriate information publicly available.
- ✓ Be open to holding further consultations at later stages in the project cycle.

USAID should also consider one-time funding for NGOs or umbrella groups around specific processes, such as those around USAID strategic planning or around national development plans. Support should be considered for travel costs, research so organizations can present evidence during dialogues, and for continued post-consultation engagement.

- ▶ **Reduce country-level burdens through shared analysis and collaboration:** In many countries, there are multiple simultaneous overlapping consultative and analytical missions being conducted. As per the new Presidential Policy Directive on Development, the U.S. government should follow through on commitments to align with country strategies that meet quality and consultation standards. USAID and other U.S. government agencies must also make every effort to use the analysis behind national plans or those of other donors as the basis for their own strategic planning.

Where additional analysis is required, U.S. government policy should be flexible enough to allow collaboration and sharing with other actors and processes. The wheel does not need to be remade each time the United States requires information for its planning and program design processes.

“The key challenge in the aid architecture is doing development in such a way that the people in charge do the right thing because, in the end, they realize it’s in their interest to do that. And the best way to do that is to build the public’s engagement.

— Local NGO, Tanzania

Box 3: The Global Fund – wide ranging stakeholder participation

Each Global Fund partner country sets up a Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM). The CCM is a partnership of the government, donors, civil society, and private sector. Its role includes devising and submitting national plans to the Board in Geneva, selecting Principal Recipients to implement grants, oversight of grant performance, and linking Global Fund programs to national health programs. The exact structure of every CCM is different to allow the best fit for country circumstances. However, each is meant to reflect the Global Fund’s belief that “wide participation leads to better program results and faster implementation”. Key characteristics include:⁵

- ▶ **CCM membership reflects a range of stakeholders:** At least 40 percent of membership should be from nongovernmental sectors. People affected by HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria must also be included. For example, in Tanzania, of 16 CCM members, six are from civil society, two represent people affected by the Global Fund diseases, four are from government, three are development partners, and three from the private sector.
- ▶ **Transparent selection processes for nongovernmental members:** CCM members must be selected by their own sectors.
- ▶ **Regular consultation with constituencies:** CCM members are required to consult with and provide feedback from the communities they represent. Each

CCM member’s engagement is as a representative of her wider community, rather than as an individual.

- ▶ **Senior governmental representation mandates streamlined decision-making:** For example, in Tanzania, the Permanent Secretaries or Executive Chairs of three line ministries and the Prime Minister’s Office are members of the CCM. The CCM Secretariat is also housed in the Tanzania Commission for AIDS, facilitating coordination with national programs.
- ▶ **Input from a broad range of stakeholders in proposal development and grant oversight:** A broad range of stakeholders (both CCM and non-CCM members) need to contribute at all stages of the project cycle. This ensures objectives and activities are owned by the affected groups, not just a handful of experts. Calls for proposals are publicly announced with time scheduled for widespread participation.⁶

“Because we have all the different groups represented in the CCM, when a decision is made, we know all the different stakeholders have been involved. The forum is complete.”

— Tanzania National Coordinating Mechanism

Strategy 3: Equip U.S. policies & bureaucratic structures with adequate country-level flexibility

In many cases, the best efforts of U.S. government staff and their counterparts in national governments to pursue locally owned models of development are being thwarted by the bureaucratic rigidities of the foreign assistance program. It is encouraging that attention is being paid to reforming systems so that USAID and other U.S. government agencies are empowered to respond to the ideas and recommendations emerging from consultations they or others have held. Yet, more needs to be done to remove further barriers to budgetary and programmatic flexibility. Save the Children's research highlights:

- ▶ **Reduce earmarks and directives on foreign assistance and increase country level flexibility to program resources:** The percentage of country budgets that are firmly earmarked for a specific purpose varies from country to country. In many countries, earmarks are prohibitively high, restricting the ability to reprogram funds if circumstances change and preventing U.S. government personnel from responding to the outcomes of discussions, analysis and consultations with stakeholders.

For instance, the USAID missions in Ethiopia and Tanzania estimated that the share of their programmatic budgets that were unearmarked or unallocated under presidential initiatives on average stood at 2 percent and 1 percent respectively each year.⁷

- ▶ **Augment USAID's staff numbers and supplement mission operating expenses:** Much has been written about the erosion of USAID's staff numbers and operating expenses over recent years. Throughout its research, Save the Children has heard the frustrations of USAID personnel about their transformation from direct practitioners of development programming to contract managers.

In countries like South Sudan where security concerns and transportation costs are burdensome on budgets, staff often felt they were overly confined to mission compounds and restricted in their interactions with beneficiary communities of U.S. assistance. Efforts to remedy this through a significant recruitment drive and larger operational budgets are currently underway. These should be supported and maintained.

“A shift in the aid paradigm is needed where local initiatives are followed through. But the problem here is that the kinds of things local people want and have the capacity to do – for example, a youth football league or building one health center – are not on the kinds of scale donors want.”

— Local NGO, South Sudan

Endnotes

1 The White House, *Factsheet on the U.S. Global Development Policy*, 22 September 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/09/22/fact-sheet-us-global-development-policy>.

2 MCC, *Guidelines for the Consultative Process*, Washington, DC, last updated March 2009, p.2.

3 An outline of the Jordan consultation process is available from the MCA-Jordan website: http://www.mca-jordan.gov.jo/index.php?page_type=pages&page_id=339.

4 Save the Children's briefs can be found at http://www.savethechildren.org/site/c.8rKLXMGIpI4E/b.6151901/k.A29A/Aid_Effectiveness.htm.

5 The Global Fund, *Lessons Learned in the Field: Health Financing and Governance – Report on the Country Coordinating Mechanism Model*, Geneva, 2007, http://www.theglobalfund.org/documents/publications/other/CCM/CCM_report.pdf.

6 The Global Fund, *Clarifications on CCM Minimum Requirements*, Geneva, 2005, <http://www.theglobalfund.org/en/ccm/guidelines/#dashboard>, p.1.

7 For FY2008, the USAID mission in Ethiopia estimated that only \$20 million of a total budget of nearly \$900 million was not earmarked or part of a presidential initiative. For FY2010, the USAID/Tanzania mission estimated that \$4 million of its total budget of \$370 million was not specifically earmarked.

About the research

With support from the Hewlett Foundation, Save the Children conducts a research and advocacy program examining the effectiveness of the U.S. foreign assistance program and making recommendations for its reform.

The research contained in this report draws upon information gathered in a series of research trips to Jordan, Tanzania and South Sudan in August 2010, and research interviews with key stakeholders in Washington, DC. The report was researched and authored by Alice Burt.

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